THE BABIES OF BELGIUM

America's Famous Word Painter Describes Conditions He Has Seen in The Devastated Land of Blood-stained Fields and Tear-stained Cities

(WILL IRWIN.)

Two or three little pictures before I really begin:

It was the Pas de Calais at the end of October—an October blessed, in this year of dread, with clear, cool, bracing weather, much like our own Indian Summer. Around a turn in the road came a strange, shuffling multitude, doubly strange in that well-ordered landscape.

At the head marched an old woman, a stalwart, straight-backed Flemish woman, vigorous in spite of her sixty years. Beside her walked a boy of not more than twelve, his figure already settling into a peasant solidity. He, like the old woman, carried on his back a bundle wrapped in a sheet. And between them they dragged by the hand a little girl, not more than six years old—half carried her, since now and then she raised her feet from the ground and let them support her.

It was plain to see why she lifted her feet. Her poor little shoes, heavy though they had been in the beginning, were worn clear through. Her clothes and hair were matted with dirt, and her face was gray with it, save for the streaks made by her tears. She had stopped crying now; she was beyond that. There comes the time with all these refugees, young and old, when they get beyond tears.

Behind followed the rest of the refugee caravan, like these leaders except for minor details. Of course, there was not among them a man of vigorous years—only a few grandfathers, trudging along beside their women folks. Mainly, it was a collection of young children—all, like the little girl in the leading party, beyond tears with misery.

Pouring Into France.

A dozen of the women, at least, carried babes in arms who had somehow survived the miseries of days and days of walking. These were the last of the Belgian refugees to pour into France. They came, mainly, from that thickly-settled, fertile, once prosperous southwestern strip, along which Germans and allies were now fighting for the bridge-head of the Yser.

But not all. Some of them—as I learned from the few who had the energy to talk—lived further North. A month before they had fled from the German advance after the capture of Antwerp; and they had been fleeing ever since—sleeping in the fields through rain and shine, eating what bread of charity Heaven only knows.

The tail of the procession, I found, had halted at a crossroads beside which someone had erected a tent from blankets strung on sticks. As I approached, wondering what this might be, an automobile came whizzing down the road at seventy miles an hour—there are no speed laws for military automobiles in time of war. It stopped beside the tent; there was a parley and a man in Belgium uniform wearing a Red Cross brassard on his arm alighted.

"What is it—what is happening?" I asked the first of the refugees beside the tent—an old man who crouched in the gutter.

"Un enfant—a baby is being born," he said briefly. The man in uniform was a Belgian surgeon taking time from his work of repairing death to assist in giving life.

Calais Faded and Dirty.

Again: it was the next day in Calais—Calais, once so busy and so venerable, and in spots so pretty, but now faded and dirty with the passage of armies. Ten thousand of these refugees came into Calais that day. That day, also, the Red Cross was bringing in Belgian wounded by the thousand—there had been serious fighting along the Yser.

The refugees, herded or escorted by the police, streamed down the streets to the concentration yards prepared for them on the dock of the French government, which was going to transport them to the Midi as soon as it could get the steamers. You would hear now and then the toot of an automobile horn, and the refugees would make way for the passage of a motor-car loaded to capacity with the white-faced wounded. The car would go on, and the refugees would close their gaps and resume their weary, nerveless pace.

At the concentration yards they sat in family groups, the children huddled about their mothers and grandmothers like chickens around hens. No child among them laughed or played; they were too weary for that; but no child cried. I was trying to have speech with these refugees, and finding them too nerveless to give any account of their adventures when an ambulance arrived.

A nurse and a physician descended. A woman rose from a distant group and joined them. She carried in her arms a bundle wrapped in rags. The slant of her back showed that the bundle contained a child—there is an attitude of motherhood which none can mistake.

The women in the nearest group followed the pantomime with their tearless, hopeless eyes.

"What is it?" I asked.

For a time none of the women answered. Then one spoke in a dead tone.

"Her baby is dead," she said. "She had no milk in her."

Many Dead Babies.

All that happened on the fringe of Belgium, to the refugees who had made their way out and were nearing safety, and enough comfort to keep soul and body together.

I could multiply instances from the observation of others. There was, for example, the group of two hundred refugees who arrived in Holland early in November. They carried with them four dead, new-born babies.

It was the same story which one hears everywhere. The mothers were so reduced by privation that they had no milk of their own. As for cows' milk, it was not to be had for any money.

Add another picture, brought out by an American from Belgium. He stood one morning by the back door of a German cook camp, watching a group of Belgian women grubbing through the trash-heap piled up behind the camp. All these women carried babies.

"What are they doing?" he asked a German sergeant with whom he had struck up acquaintance.

"Scraping our condensed milk cans," said the sergeant. "It's the only way to get milk for their babies. I've seen them run their fingers rund a can which looked as bright as a new coin, and hold them into the babies' mouths to suck. My company," he added, "has been getting along without milk in its coffee and giving it to these women. We've received no orders to the contrary—and we're mostly family men. But we're an exception; and it doesn't go very far."

Picture From Stricken Brussels.

Here is another recent picture from stricken Brussels, that gay, dainty, lively city in old times—the city whose smiling people called it petit Paris. The scene is the once busy, pleasant boulevard Bischofsheim. A woman collapses on a bench set along the sidewalk after the fashion of the Greater Paris. In her arms is a baby. A child staggers along, clinging to her apron. The woman's face is blue and yellow; she is on the verge of collapse. The baby, surely not over five months old, has a pale, lead-colored skin. Its mouth is open as though set that way. Its eyes are closed.

Two women of Brussels pass this unhappy group. They hurriedly exchange some words, turn back to the woman on the bench. Then one stands guard while the other hastens for some milk and bread—such as is to be found in the Brussels of today. They force a little milk between the teeth of the mother. They let the baby drink. Unweaned though it is, it drinks as though it had never drunk otherwise.

To the face of the mother comes a few patches of color. She slowly recovers until she is able to eat a bit of bread. The baby opens its mouth, drinks more greedily. "It has not fed since two days," the mother whispers.

The mother tries to rise from the bench but she cannot. The elder child drinks the milk that is left. It looks curiously at the piece of bread as if it did not knew what it was. The mother forces it to eat. A crowd has gathered, murmuring. This sight is not new, yet each time it draws a little crowd. Every one would like to give—but no one can. Who is not poor at this moment? Many of them have children at home who today weigh less than the day they were born.

France and England and Germany and Austria are issuing their lists of the dead, which are mounting up day by day to a ghastly million. But these take account only of the strong young men who have died in the fighting. They do not take account of mere non-combatants. They do not list the women who, foolishly or ignorantly sticking to their homes, have died under the shell-fire of enemies or friends. They do not list the weak and helpless who have dropped out from the pathetic caravans of refugees to perish along the edges of the roads. They do not take list of those who are beginning to die by hunger in stricken Belgium. And finally, they do not list these babes of Belgium, dropping off before their lives have fairly begun, because there is no milk.

Ringed With Steel.

Let us view the situation in cold blood. Belgium is shut off from the world—ringed with steel. Her own food supply was used up long ago, either by the people or by their conquerors. The cattle were first of all to go; even in August I saw the Germans killing milch cows for rations. A cow or a small dairy herd is left here or there; but they are the exceptions.

The supply of condensed milk ran short long ago. Now milk is a necessity to most civilized children between the ages of one and two years. Some children, it is true, pull through under exceptional circumstances of privation, without it; but these are the unusually sturdy; they stand apart from the rule. The average young child must have milk or he will die. And there is no milk.

Again, the suckling baby must have mother's milk or a substitute. There is, of course, no substitute to be had in Belgium and equally there is little mother's milk.

Every woman knows that a civilized nursing mother must "keep up her strength." She must have nourishing food—in many cases special food. Every woman knows that a certain proportion of civilized mothers cannot feed their own babies even at that.

Nourishing food—special food! The news which filters out of that locked, stricken country to the American Commission for Relief in Belgium makes a sarcasm and a mockery of those phrases.

A Bun a Day.

In many, if not most Belgian cities, the populace is down to one large baker's bun a day, issued by the municipial authorities. In some places, the authorities have been able to supplement that ration by one bowl of cabbage soup a day. One bun and one bowl of cabbage soup a day—for a nursing mother!

Yet that is all they have and all they will have this winter at the best America can do. The American Commission hopes at best to transmit ten ounces of food a day to each inhabitant of Belgium—and to do that the people of the United States must strain every resource of charity. How little that is for a civilized human being, and especially for a nursing mother, becomes plain when one learns that the average inhabitant of Greater New York consumes forty-two ounces of food a day. The best the mothers of Belgium can hope for is a quarter ration this winter.

Even allowing for the reduction of the birth rate due to the war, there must have been forty thousand births in Belgium since the Germans came. There will be forty thousand more in this winter of hardship and privation. How many of the newly-arrived forty thousand have already died unnecessarily—undecorated, unsung victims of this war—no one will ever know.

How many of the coming forty thousand will die this winter depends upon us in America—upon how much food we send to the nursing mothers, how much milk to the babies.

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SAYS RUSSIA SURE TO WIN.

New Attache for Washington Embassy Arrives.

Washington Star.

Confidence that the Russian army will force its way to Berlin and Vienna and that Germany is doomed was expressed by A. Zadde, who has just arrived in Washington from Petrograd to augment the staff of the Russian embassy. He left Petrograd two months ago, coming to the United States by way of Siberia and Japan.

"The taking of Lodz by the Germans does not amount to much," he said. "It is not an important startegic point. It is an open city, with no fortifications. The operations around Pryzemysl are far more important, and if Cracow falls, as it undoubtedly will, the road will be open for the Russians to Berlin and Vienna. The important fortified cities on the western frontier of Russia are fifty miles or more from the German border.

"In Russia there is but one sentiment," continued Mr. Zadde; that is, that Germany is doomed. The spirit of patriotism among the Russians is remarkable. If it was necessary Russia could mobilize an army of many millions more than have been called. The men who are in the field and those in reserve represent soldiers who have been trained and drilled for war. They are not volunteers.

THINKS IN FIGURES AND THINKS LIKE LIGHTNING.

Rochester, N. Y.—Alfred A. Gamble thinks in figures, and when he thinks he thinks like lightning.

When he was going to school in Rochester "teacher" called him "a crank on figures." He knew a whole lot more about them than she did. When he grew up, university professors became interested in him, and he's now giving demonstrations in "lightning calculation" before psychology classes in the West and Northwest.

In six seconds this rapid fire calculator can multiply 7,697 by 5,321 and give the answer, 40,955,737. Give him the date of your birth, and he can tell you almost instantly the day of the week you were born.

"It's just a knack, this rapid figuring of mine," says Gamble. "I've been doing it ever since I wac five years old. I was always adding or multiplying the house numbers and automobile license numbers, and before I knew it I was a 'lightning calculator.'"

Columbia, McGill, Syracuse, and Berkeley are some of the universities before which Gamble has demonstrated his ability in figures. He is only twenty-one years old.

Syracuse, N. Y., has 149,853 people.

It is the contention of geologists that the Mediterranean was once a great inland sea.

EFFORTS TO BRING FARMERS TO SOUTH

Commercial Congress Asks Legislation To Get Farmers From Europe

By the Associated Press.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 12.—Resolutions calling on the Federal government and the Southern States for legislation to care for immigrants who seek refuge in this country after the European war were adopted tonight by the immigration conference called by the Southern Commercial Congress to consider the feasibility of distributing immigrants on farms in the South.

A committee was appointed to work out some practical plan of action.

Dr. Clarence J. Owens, managing director of the Southern Commercial Congress, declared in an address that the future development of the South was measured in terms of an efficient industrial and agricultural immigration.

At the afternoon session of the conference Secretary of Labor Wilson predicted that many of the destitute immigrants who would come to the United States from Europe after the war could be placed on Southern farms if proper efforts are made to secure them. He explained the efforts of the labor, postoffice and agricultural departments to bring together "the jobless man and the manless job, the landless man and the manless land."

J. J. McKinder, an expert on Dutch colonization, who recently came from Holland, said many Dutch and Belgian farmers, ruined by the war, were anxious to come to the United States.

Senator Duncan U. Fletcher of Florida, president of the Southern Commercial Congress, presided at the sessions. Many Southern States were represented by officials.

The committee chosen to decide on a definite plan to encourage desirable immigration is composed of Dr. Owens, T. R. Preston, Chattanooga, Hugh McRae, Wilmington, N. C.; M. V. Richards, Industrial Commissioner, Southern Railway, Washington, and Robert M. Mixon, a member of the South Carolina legislature.

TWIN-CITY POULTRY SHOW.

Pigeon Exhibit a Feature—Squab Industry Growing.

(Special to The News and Observer.)

Winston-Salem, Dec. 12.—The Winston-Salem Poultry Association has just closed one of the most successful poultry shows in the history of the association. There were fully 500 chickens and 500 pigeons on exhibit and several hundred dollars were given away in prizes. Birds were exhibited from all parts of the State, but the majority of the exhibits were local.

Featuring the exhibits was the large number of pigeons shown. There were fully 500 of them and they attracted a great deal of attention. Most of them were exhibited by local squab raisers and many fine collections were among the exhibits.

The squab industry has grown to large proportions in this city and vicinity. There are as many as 10 squabberies here and they ship thousands and thousands of squabs to Northern markets every year. Everything is favorable to the industry here and it is not at all improbable that it will grow to considerable larger proportions within the next few years.

PLAY BY BENSON SCHOOL

Good Audience at Four Oaks—Fine New Home Completed.

(Special to The News and Observer.)

Four Oaks, Dec. 12.—A cast composed of students of the Benson high school gave a play, "The Country Doctor," in the auditorium of the Four Oaks graded school last evening to an appreciative audience. The play is one affording an opportunity for much good acting and considerable talent was displayed by those composing the cast. Four Oaks was fortunate in their visit, and Benson high school is to be congratulated upon the creditable showing made by its representatives in the play.

Mr. G. K. Massengill has just moved into his handsome new residence on Maple avenue recently completed at a cost of approximately $10,000. Mr. Massengill has given close personal supervision to the building of his new home and now has one of the handsomest and most convenient, if not the largest, in the town.

Big Yield of Buckwheat.

From Elkin Tribune.

Mr. Sam Smith of Buckshoals tells us of a big buckwheat yield that he and Mr. Arthur Coleman made this year. Out of two bushels of seed buckwheat they made 140 bushels. They sowed the 7th day of August.

Colorado has dozens of mountains without names.